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Scoring and testing explained

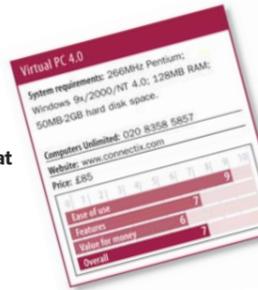
Each review rates a product according to a set criterion for its type. The score is broken down at the end of the review to show how we reached our final verdict. Ratings range from 1 to 10 and fall into the following classifications: 1 to 3 – poor 4 to 6 – average 6 to 8 – good 8 to 10 – excellent

Hardware categories

- Features **This rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 1.5GHz PC with 256MB of RAM and 60GB hard drive would score highly.**
- Build quality **How well the product is made and the quality of the components.**
- Value for money **The price of a product will often be the deciding factor between a good review and a bad review. This is not to say that cheaper products will always win out, but the better the price/performance and features ratio the higher the score.**

Software categories

- Ease of use **Describes how easy it is to install and use the software.**
- Features **As with hardware, this rating indicates how much the software package contains. An office suite that only came with a word processor would score poorly.**
- Value for money **Lots of features, good performance and a low price tag will result in a good score.**



Scoring

- Software **Overall ratings for software take into account the three main assessment categories above and any other factors that are covered in the detailed review.**
- Hardware **Because we provide product charts which rank hardware from 1 to 10 across a category, we do not provide overall scores. To gauge how well a hardware product has fared against the competition, look at where it falls in the relevant Top 10 chart.**

All our rankings are based on a calculation of features and performance compared to price, so the highest-scoring products also represent the best value for money. For those products not featured in our charts, anything we consider particularly outstanding is awarded a Recommended logo. Charts are introduced, amended or removed as and when necessary to cover any emerging hardware sectors, advances in technology or changes in the industry.



The Best Buy and Recommended awards

A Best Buy product offers a superlative combination of features, performance, value for money and customer service. Those that earn a Recommended award are almost as good, offering great value, quality and performance.

Prices

All the prices printed in *PC Advisor* are quoted by the manufacturer or distributor and exclude VAT. Prices are only intended as a guide, and you may see products on sale for less or more than our quoted price.

If you're interested in purchasing any of the products reviewed in *PC Advisor*, please contact the manufacturer or supplier direct, mentioning both the magazine and the issue in which you saw the product. If they won't supply the product as reviewed, please contact reviews@idg.com. Please note manufacturers are under no obligation to feature reviewed products on their website.



To keep things fresh we've got a couple of additions in our *Reviews* section this month. First, to recognise the growing popularity of DVD discs as a backup medium, we've introduced a DVD writer chart on page 108. Our second extra is a feature that aims to offer one-to-one advice to a reader each month, Reader's choice.

Reader's choice

Reader's choice invites one reader each month to visit our offices and receive expert advice to help them make the best purchasing decisions. The idea is that you write to us and let us know what you are looking to buy, and we get a selection of products in that match your budget and needs. Then you visit us and we run you through the pros and cons of each device, to allow you to choose the one that's best for you.

If you are thinking of investing in some new hardware kit and you'd like a helping hand from *PC Advisor*, email us and let us know what you are looking for at reviews@idg.com. Alternatively, write to Spencer Dalziel at the usual address. Even if you aren't picked to come in to the offices, we think you will find the advice we provide useful. To get a taste of what's on offer turn to page 88 where we help a reader choose a laser printer for his business.

DVD chart

Our new DVD writer chart runs alongside a refreshed CD-RW chart, so if you don't need the extra capacity offered by DVD, but still want backup facilities

for your PC, we've got a run down of the best in the market on page 108. The other chart that comes in for an overhaul this month is Power PCs on page 92.

Getting technical

To follow last month's round-up of all the latest monitors, this month's *Technofile* on page 79 takes a look at monitor technology. We explore all the issues you need to consider when investing in a new screen. Plus, to give you a full picture of the market, we look at a few models that fall outside our charts due to their price or size.

Hot hardware and software

We offer you an exclusive preview of JVC's GR-DV3000 camcorder, a high-end model packed with handy features. To see what it has to offer turn to page 60.

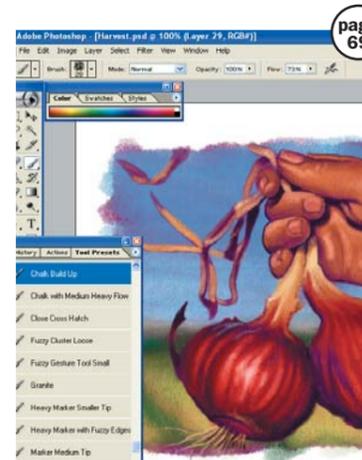
Other highlights include Compaq's Evo N200 subnotebook (page 62); a couple of printers from Canon, one of which is aimed at the cost-conscious buyer, while the other targets those who want top-quality image reproduction (see page 61 and 64 respectively). There's also the Olympus Camedia C40 Zoom, which steals a Best Buy award this month – see why we rate it so highly on page 61.

Business users will appreciate the arrival of the BlackBerry on our shores. This PDA (personal digital assistant) provides genuine email access on the move, thanks to the use of GPRS (general packet radio service) technology. However, it comes at a price. To see whether it's worth it read the review on page 58.

The arrival of the long-awaited version 7.0 of Adobe's image-editing package, Photoshop, is heralded with a review of the beta version on page 69. For those who like their graphics more animated we have Macromedia Flash MX and Adobe LiveMotion 2.0 on page 70. Don't forget to check out our new *Hot off the press* section on page 35 for the latest Palm PDAs, two new Toshiba notebooks and the AMD2 100+ Athlon XP PC.

Coming up

Next month sees *Technofile* tackling network printers, while the charts that come under the spotlight are Budget PCs and Digital projectors. ■



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